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Waynesboro National Guard unit does it "the hard way"

NASHVILLE, Tn -- Sometimes there's not a whole lot going on in Middle Tennessee's Waynesboro on a Sunday afternoon. That's unless you're at the National Guard Armory with the soldiers of Assault Troop, 1/278th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

One particular January drill found these infantrymen in full formation, chest deep in the middle of Wayne County's Green River promoting one of their own. They were carrying on a tradition that began almost a year earlier when they were transformed from artillery to infantry.

It was started by the Detachment Commander with a river-crossing exercise at the end of an April drill last year. He had heard from a Sergeant Major friend of a similar custom back in the 1950's in a Johnson City National Guard unit. "My original idea with the crossing was to instill mental toughness in the platoon so they wouldn't worry about their environment and let it slow them down," explained 1st Lt. Dave Roberts.

At the conclusion of that first river crossing, a formation was held right smack in the middle of the river to promote one of their soldiers. "We were already wet, and what better way to promote an infantry soldier than by doing it the hard way," Roberts said. Part of the deal is that no soldier is allowed to leave the river until completely and thoroughly soaked.

There was some grumbling in the beginning, but members of the Waynesboro unit quickly began to develop a sense of pride in doing "what other units considered crazy."

But the January drill this year, with temperatures hovering at 20 degrees, was a true test of their mettle. The Assault Troopers had not formed up in the river in a couple of months, and four soldiers were to be promoted. But with platoon leaders and platoon sergeants leading the way, they hit the frigid water without hesitating.

There was plenty of shivering and chattering of teeth, but when it was all over the soldiers knew they had once again done something plenty of others would never consider doing. They'd done it *their* way and the pride was apparent in their faces.

That pride and toughness carries over into the training on drill weekends, with the soldiers always putting out 100 percent. They've developed the motto, "Train Like Hell! Fight Like Hell!" and esprit de corps has climbed and climbed.

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Roberts credits much of the success to his Non-commissioned officer corps. "It takes leaders at every level to make each drill a special one so the soldiers are always looking forward to next month," he said.

The 1st Lt. feels that being an infantry troop in a cavalry regiment is the best of both worlds. The 278th Armored Cavalry history dates back to the 117th Infantry Regiment, one of the most decorated regiments in the entire US Army. The 117th played critical roles in some of the major battles of World War One and World War Two, from breaking the Hindenburg and Siegfried Lines to the Battle of the Bulge. They never once failed to attain an objective.

"The Tennessee Infantryman has a proud combat legacy that began during the Revolution and has spanned over 200 years," Roberts said. "Believe me when I say that these young soldiers realize they're part of that legacy. They consider themselves unstoppable."

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Cutlines:

Lt. Charles Stewart, of Savannah, and 1st Sgt. Jeffrey Sanderson, of Collinwood, promoting their soldiers in Wayne County's bone-chilling Green River in January. Pvt. 1st Class Michael Hill (left), of Shelbyville, advancing to Specialist; Pvt. Caleb Workman, of Lawrenceburg, to Pvt. 1st Class; and Pvt. 1st Class Tyler Sanderson of Savannah, to Specialist.

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